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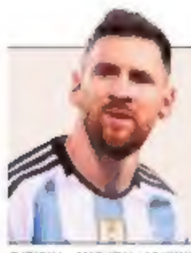


SHAH RUKH KHAN PIPS MESSI TO WIN TIME MAGAZINE'S READERS' POLL

The Bollywood actor won the 2023 TIME100 poll, in which readers voted for individuals to be on TIME's annual list of the most influential people

SRK GARNERS 4% OF 1.2 MILLION VOTES CAST

SRK bagged 4% of the 1.2 million votes cast by the magazine's readers. The second slot went to the Iranian women protesting for freedom from the country's Islamic regime, garnering 3% of the total votes. At the third spot were health care workers with 2% of the votes. Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, came in fourth with 1.9% of the votes polled

ARGENTINIAN SOCCER STAR AT 5TH POSITION

- Khan, 57, is currently riding high on the success of his latest film Pathaan, which has become a runaway blockbuster globally
- Released in January 2023, the film is one of the top grossing films of the year so far, collecting nearly $130 million worldwide
- The fifth place went to soccer star Lionel Messi with 1.8% of total votes

April 13

WHEN TIME'S EDITORS WILL REVEAL THEIR CHOICES FOR THE 2023 TIME100 LIST

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TRICHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya chairs a meeting to review the Covid-19 situation, in New Delhi on Friday | PTI

Ramp up tests, says govt as Covid-19 cases climb

400% jump in fresh cases; health minister holds review meet

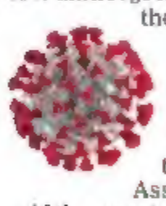
KAVITA BAJELI-DATT @ New Delhi

DESPITE a 400% rise in Covid-19 cases in India in the last two weeks, testing hasn't picked up, with some states not even sharing publicly the data on the number of RT-PCR tests being conducted daily, even though the Centre has issued advisories on ramping it up.

Concerned by the laxity, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday at a national review meeting with health ministers of all states pointed out that the average tests per million in 23 states and Union territories was below the national average.

He directed states to expeditiously increase the rate of testing from the current rate of 100 tests per million (as on week ending April 7). States were further advised to increase the share of RT-PCR in tests.

A latest survey conducted among 11,000 people in 303 districts in the country showed that 76% did not go for Covid-19 testing, even though they had its symptoms.



The survey deduced that the actual Covid cases might be underreported by 300% in India at present. Dr Rajeev Jayadevan, co-chairman of the National Indian Medical Association's Covid-19 task force, said the reported number would not be close to the actual count of infections in any community, especially during the time of a surge.

Experts said testing is important as it not only helps in generating a more "accurate epidemiological picture" but in providing quick treatment as well as isolation for an asymptomatic patient who might otherwise transmit the disease in the community.

According to Krishna Prasad N C, a Covid data analyst, during the first and second Covid-19 waves, India conducted 17.7 crore Covid tests in 2020 and 54 crore in 2021. In 2022, the number went down to 19.5 crore. This year, till April 5 when India is once again registering a Covid surge triggered by XBB.1.16, just 1.1 crore Covid tests have been recorded.

Experts said the reason for the low testing could be due to Covid fatigue. Also, many take home tests, whose accuracy is uncertain.

No policy to provide compensation for vax adverse effects: Govt

P RAMDAS @ Kochi

THE Union government has told the Kerala High Court that it does not have a policy to pay compensation to those who suffer from Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) as a result of Covid vaccination.

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare made the submission in response to a petition filed by the parents of an MA student from Pathanamthitta who allegedly died after getting a Covid jab in August 2021. The ministry said the Centre's guidelines do not include forcible vaccination.

Based on global best practices

The ministry said India's Covid vax drive was based on emerging scientific and epidemiological evidence, WHO guidelines and global best practices

Alleging that their only daughter Nova Sabu died after taking Covishield, the vaccine manufactured by Serum Institute of India, her parents Sabu C Thomas and Jean George had moved court seeking ₹1 crore as compensation. They said Nova took the vaccine from a private hospital in Kochi in July 2021 and became unwell from the very next day. They alleged her death was a direct effect of the administration of the vaccine. Since vaccination was made compulsory by the Centre, the deceased had no option but to book a slot in the website concerned and get the jab, they said in the petition.

However, the health ministry pushed back saying its directions and guidelines "do not entail forcible vaccination. The vaccination is in larger public interest. It is duly advised, advertised and communicated... However, this in no way implies that any person can be forced to be vaccinated against their wish."

Rebels may mar Cong prospects in 12 seats

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Bengaluru

THE Congress party, which has announced its second list of 42 candidates, is facing rebellion from those who have not been given tickets. They are likely to make it tough for the party's official candidates in over 12 assembly constituencies in the May 10 elections.

JDS is likely to benefit from this rebellion as it has approached many of them and is likely to field them as its candidates. Either they win as JDS nominees or mar the chances of Congress candidates as they are considered formidable candidates. BJP may also benefit from them, according to political pundits.

For instance in Chitradurga, former MLC Raghu Achar was approached by JDS MLC TA Saravana on Friday. Achar is likely to join JDS on April 14. The Congress has given ticket to actor Doddanna's son-in-law KC Veerendra (Pappy), who was defeated as JDS candidate in the 2018 elections. Another aspirant from the same constituency SK Basavaraj has been denied Congress ticket.

In Kadur, former MLA YSV Datta, who quit JDS and joined Congress, has not been given ticket.

Datta will hold a meeting of his supporters on Sunday to decide his next course of action. He may go back to JDS, a source told *TNIE*. It depends on CLP leader Siddaramaiah's talks with Datta on how the Congress will accommodate him in the party, the source added.

In Datta's case, an audio in which he had predicted that KPCC president DK Shivakumar is unlikely to become CM if the Congress comes back power may have spoiled his chances.

The Congress has given ticket to KS Anand, a Kuruba, who was defeated in the last elections.

CONTINUED ON: P4

BJP list likely today?

Hubballi: The BJP Parliamentary Board, which will meet on Saturday, is likely to finalise the candidates' list for the Assembly elections. Announcing this, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Friday said two to three candidates have been shortlisted for each constituency and the board will take a final decision. P4

SPP to dispose of Jaya's seized assets

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE state government has appointed a Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) to dispose of properties worth crores of rupees seized from former Tamil Nadu chief minister late J Jayalalithaa in a 1996 disproportionate assets case.

Kiran S Javali has been appointed as the SPP to appear before the Special Court in the city on behalf of the State of Karnataka with reference to the disposal of properties seized in the case of Jayalalithaa and others.

The properties were seized from Jayalalithaa's Poes Garden residence in December 1996, and included seven kg of gold ornaments, diamonds, about 600 kg of silver ornaments, 11,344 sarees, 250 shawls, 750 pairs of footwear, 12 refrigerators, 44 air-conditioning machines and 91 wristwatches. These items have been lying in government's custody after the CBI special court convicted Jayalalithaa and her three associates in the disproportionate assets case in 2014.

The seized properties could not be disposed of in the absence of a Special Public Prosecutor and the CBI court wrote to the registrar general of the Karnataka High Court in October 2022 in this regard.

The law department issued a notification on March 27, 2023, appointing the SPP. This was in response to the special court's letter to the Karnataka Home secretary to appoint a Special Public Prosecutor.

The appointment was disclosed after a query was made under the Right to Information Act by an activist.

Drunk flyer tries to open door flap

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE airport police detained a 30-year-old drunk flyer for trying to open the flap of one of the emergency doors of an Indigo flight from Delhi to Bengaluru on Friday.

The incident occurred on board flight 6e 308, which took off from Indira Gandhi International Airport at 7.56 am.

R Prateek, who was on seat No. 18F, was drunk and attempted to open the flap of the emergency door, airport source said.

CONTINUED ON: P5

Kiran Reddy is BJP's latest acquisition

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

THE BJP's Mission South ahead of the 2024 general elections got another push on Friday when the last chief minister of undivided Andhra Pradesh and veteran Congress leader N Kiran Kumar Reddy, 64, joined the party here.

As many as 11 chief ministers of undivided Andhra Pradesh belonged to the powerful Reddy community.

Kiran hails from Telangana's Chittur district. Whether or not he will add value to the BJP's quest to make inroads in Telangana is unclear as analysts don't see him as a political powerhouse anymore.

Kiran's acquisition came a day after the BJP inducted veteran Congress leader A K Antony's son Anil, leaving his dad in a difficult position.

Recalling his family's long association with the Congress, Kiran said both he and his father Amarnath Reddy were four-time MLAs. However, the Congress high command no longer takes the people's verdict seriously, one reason why he quit the party, said Kiran.

EXPRESS INTAKE

Dependence on survey report fuels dissent in Cong | P4

Don't waste your ballots, says veteran | P4

Jumbo census for all south states | P5

Bandi dares KCR to order judicial probe | P5

INTERVIEW
BJP SEEKING POSITIVE MANDATE
Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje says development is the only agenda for the BJP | P4

PUNJAB ON ALERT

Rapid Action Force personnel in Amritsar after a flag march on Friday. Fugitive Amritpal Singh's call for a meeting of Sikh community on Baisakhi day on April 14 has kept the security forces on high alert | PTI

Ban telecast of Sudeep's movies: JDS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A day after actor 'Kiccha' Sudeep announced that he would campaign for BJP, as suggested by Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, in the May 10 Assembly elections in the state, Janata Dal Secular (JDS) has written to the Chief Electoral Officer of Karnataka seeking a ban on telecast of movies, advertisements and other programmes featuring the actor.

Pradeep Kumar, spokesperson and general secretary of the state legal cell of JDS, filed a petition with the CEC on Thursday stating that telecast of Sudeep's movies, advertisements and TV programmes should be banned till the election process is completed.

Kumar stated that telecast of the actor's movies or programmes may influence the voters and hence, orders should be issued to ban the same. He also appealed to the CEC to direct the authorities concerned to remove the posters having the actor's photo from public places.

On Wednesday, Sudeep addressed a press conference with Bommai and announced that he would be campaigning for BJP in the Assembly elections.

Opposition cracks as Pawar raps JPC probe call on Adani

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ Mumbai

WHILE the Congress and other Opposition parties are sharpening their attack on the Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre over the Adani issue, NCP supremo Sharad Pawar on Friday struck a discordant note, saying there is no need for a JPC probe into the allegations levelled by Hindenburg Research against the Indian conglomerate since the Supreme Court is seized of the matter.

"If the Supreme Court, who no one can influence, is to conduct an inquiry, then there is a better chance of truth coming to light. After the Supreme Court announced an inquiry, there was no significance of a JPC probe. It was not needed," he told NDTV in an interview.

The veteran politician said allegations were raised against companies in the past as well, followed by heated debates in Parliament, but 'out-of-proportion' importance seems to have been given to the Adani issue.

Questioning the narrative around the Hindenburg Research's report, Pawar said: "An individual industrial group of the country was targeted... that is what it seems."

Raising doubts about Hindenburg Research, he said: "We had never heard of these people... what is their background. When they raise issues that cause a ruckus across the country, the cost is borne by the country's economy. We cannot disregard these things."

While Pawar's remarks could make considerable damage to Opposition unity, the Congress sought to downplay it with party leader Jairam Ramesh saying: "The NCP may have its views but 19 like-minded Opposition parties are convinced the PM-linked Adani Group issue is real and very serious."

It's virtual war as parties let loose cyber warriors

CHETAN MG @ Bengaluru

WITH just about a month for Assembly elections in the state, leaders of various parties are busy campaigning, bearing the brunt of a scorching sun. But giving a major push to political parties from behind the scenes are the cyber warriors, who are burning the midnight oil, setting narratives and planning strategies and counter-strategies.

With the rapid penetration of the internet in the rural areas — besides the foot-on-the-ground campaigning — elections are being fought on the virtual battlefield. All major political parties have their own teams of cyber warriors, handling their social media accounts. The teams are a mix of professionals and volunteers working in consultation with the party leaders.

The Congress and JDS have a dedicated team of 18-20 and 25-30 members, respectively. The BJP has set up state and district-level teams, besides a dedicated team for each assembly segment.

Chairman of KPCC Communications and Social Media Cell Priyank Kharge, MLA, said the Congress is not in a defending mode, but on the offensive this time, citing the examples of '40% Sarkara', 'PayCM' and 'Kivi Mele Hoova' (Flower on ear) campaigns.

"Our team is just debunking the narratives and theories of BJP and its troll armies, which we were not doing effectively earlier. We are also exposing the corruption in the government and ensuring they reach people through out-of-the-box thinking and catchy phrases. There are multiple rounds of checks to ensure that the posts are backed by facts and figures," Kharge said, adding that occupying the mind space of youngsters is the key while retaining them is a challenge.

JDS appears to be more focused and organised than ever in reaching out to the masses through digital platforms. KA Thippeswamy, MLC and in charge of the party's social media, said experts have been roped in and training has been provided to all team members.

"This time we are more organised and have ramped up our capacity. We are creating social media profiles of all candidates and are focusing on posts related to constituency-specific issues with solutions for the same.

CONTINUED ON: P5

The Congress is not in a defending mode, but on the offensive this time, citing the examples of '40% Sarkara', 'PayCM' and 'Kivi Mele Hoova' campaigns

Priyank Kharge, Chairman, KPCC Social Media Cell

EXPRESS READ

HAL's 3rd LCA production line inaugurated in Nashik

Bengaluru: The third LCA production line was inaugurated at HAL's Nashik Division on Friday. After opening the line, Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane appreciated the defence PSU for establishing a new production line for LCA manufacturing. He also handed over the 100th Sukhoi-30 MKI ROH aircraft to Air Vice-Marshal Sarin, Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Eng A). HAL CMD CB Ananthakrishnan said the new production line will enhance LCA MK1A production capacity from 16 to 24 aircraft per year. P5